

Bulletin of the International Union against the Venereal Diseases and Treponematoses

28th General Assembly, Malta, April 13-18, 1975

At the 28th General Assembly of the International Union against the Venereal Diseases and Treponematoses held in April 1975 in Malta, Scientific Sessions covered the following themes on April 14 to 16:

- I Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) among tourists and among immigrant workers
- II Sex education of the public and of doctors
- III Role of the practitioner, public health officer, dermatologist, and other specialists in the teaching, investigation, and treatment of STD
- IV Present position in microbiological and serological research in *Neisseria* infections

After the scientific sessions, the 28th General Assembly International Union against the Venereal Diseases and the Treponematoses, held on April 16, 1975, was opened by the President, Professor Axel Perdrup. He welcomed the delegates and thanked the Maltese hosts and the speakers at the scientific sessions, which, he said, revealed with appalling clarity the inadequate facilities for the treatment of venereal disease in many so-called developed countries and their complete absence in the developing countries. He welcomed the interest shown by the European Public Health Committee of the Council of Europe and their Resolution for the Committee of Ministers.

The Secretary General, Dr. James Jefferiss, after reminding the delegates of their Resolutions made at the 27th General Assembly, held at Venice in 1972, gave his report on the last three years' work. The main documents circulated were the 'Report of the 1971 International Travelling Seminar in the U.S.A.' and documents concerning the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers Resolution on the Control of Sexually Transmitted Diseases. He reported that the Executive Committee had met in 1973 in Brussels and in 1974 at Dijon, where Professor Canaperia handed over the office of President of the Union to Professor Axel Perdrup. The gratitude of the Union for all Professor Canaperia had

done as Secretary General and President was expressed by Dr. Guthe and echoed by all those present.

The Union had been represented at conferences at Ottawa, Lima, and Bangkok, and at several meetings of the WHO, and would be represented at the technical discussions of the 28th World Health Assembly in May, 1975, on 'Social and Public Health Aspects of Sexually Transmitted Diseases: The Need for a Better Approach'. The following recommendations of the Executive Committee (among others) were then duly ratified by the General Assembly:

(1) That a Regional Office for South East Asia and the Western Pacific should be formed, with Dr. Pierra Vejjabul as Assistant Secretary and Zone Representative.

(2) That the French title of the Union should now be 'Union Internationale contre les Maladies Vénériennes et les Tréponématoses'.

The Treasurer, Dr. R. D. Catterall, then reported on the satisfactory financial state of the Union.

The Director of the Regional Office for the Americas reported that the American Social Health Organisation was now concentrating its efforts on the control of VD instead of on the abuse of drugs.

The Director of the Regional Office for Europe, Dr. A. Siboulet, reported on their efforts to disseminate information on STD to the public, their co-operation with the WHO, and their successful efforts in enrolling Greece as a Member Organisation.

The South East Asia and Western Pacific Regional Office reported progress, especially under Dr. Sowmini in India.

The Secretary General, reporting on the Union's collaboration with the WHO, informed the Assembly that the WHO had decided to maintain official relations with the Union and had sent their representative, Dr. G. Causse, Chief Medical Officer Venereal Diseases and Treponematoses Division, to the Assembly and to the Executive Committee meetings.

Dr. Causse then addressed the General Assembly as follows:

It is a great honour for the World Health Organization and for me to be present at this General Assembly of the

International Union against the Venereal Diseases and Treponematoses.

For many years the International Union and the Service for Venereal Diseases and Treponematoses of the World Health Organization have collaborated closely in the struggle towards the same goal, and I sincerely hope that this will continue unchanged. The World Health Organization has taken the initiative during the past few years in suggesting a new approach to combat the sexually transmitted diseases. In November, 1974, at a meeting on 'The Role of Health Education in the Fight against Sexually Transmitted Diseases', many members of the International Union participated and attempted to define the role and applications of health education in this field.

In May, 1975, there will be a technical discussion at the 28th World Assembly of Health on the subject of 'Social and Public Health Aspects of the Sexually Transmitted Diseases: The Necessity for a New Approach'. We hope that many of you will take part in this meeting and inform the representatives of your governments of the urgency of the problem and the necessity for and possibility of a better approach to it.

The Situation today

The sexually transmitted diseases are still unfortunately an acute and often dramatic public health problem. They are increasing in most countries and their complications remain serious and frequent.

This epidemiological situation is well known in most countries with a well-developed health service, but there is a tendency to forget that, in more than half the world, in countries with a low level of economic development, the sexually transmitted diseases are becoming more and more prevalent. In these countries, where most of the available health facilities are directed against other endemic and epidemic conditions, the problems of the sexually transmitted diseases are largely ignored.

Recent evaluations, based on careful clinical and laboratory examinations, have shown that frequently between 2 and 10 per cent. and occasionally even from 25 to 30 per cent. of certain urban or rural populations are infected with gonorrhoea. The prevalence of urethritis associated with *Chlamydia* is often as high, and the incidence of trichomoniasis usually even greater. The continued increase in these diseases, arising from new socio-economic conditions and the mobility of populations, is only rarely counteracted by the action of the health authorities.

Recent investigations have demonstrated an alarming level of acute abdominal complications and, above all, a high percentage of cases of sterility due to these infections. These problems have been superimposed on other hormonal, microbial, and parasitic diseases.

We believe that our efforts should be aimed first of all towards the serious situation which exists in under-

developed regions. This does not mean that we underestimate or wish to diminish the importance and the necessity of undertaking research into biological, epidemiological, operational, and psychosocial factors in the developed countries. This type of research is indispensable and its results benefit everyone.

We ought, however, to do our utmost to encourage and help the underdeveloped countries to appreciate the seriousness of the sexually transmitted diseases and their consequences, and we should assist them to make an effort to control sexually transmitted diseases. Effective action can be undertaken at all levels from highly specialized hospital services down to the most simple peripheral health service.

The simplest and least costly methods used systematically have given, and could continue to give, excellent results. Lack of sophisticated equipment and methods of diagnosis is no reason for inactivity. If we could motivate health and community authorities to take energetic multidisciplinary and educative action without waiting for tomorrow to bring a miraculous solution, we should in the end have discharged the major part of our responsibility.

The following resolutions were formulated by the Assembly:

- (1) The attention of Health Authorities is called to the fact that the STD are prevalent among tourists, migrant workers, and seamen, and they are therefore recommended to take suitable action to deal with this problem.
- (2) The attention of member organizations is drawn to the lack of knowledge about the STD among the public and even among physicians. The Union recommends that further efforts should be made to improve the education of the public and particularly that of medical students and health workers about the STD.
- (3) Concern is felt about the high incidence of STD in areas with insufficient public health organizations. The Union recommends the better use of the existing facilities and the expansion of control measures.
- (4) Basic and applied research into STD appear to be producing practical results which are likely to be of social and economic importance. It is therefore recommended that further research into these diseases should be given high priority.

The President closed the Assembly with thanks to all who had contributed to the success of the meeting and assured Dr. Causse of the WHO of the Union's continued co-operation. He announced that the next General Assembly would be held in Mexico City in October, 1977, immediately after the International Congress of Dermatology.